

May 29th, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

The COVID-19 pandemic underscores the importance of the food and agriculture sector to the health and wellbeing of our rural communities. As farmers struggle, so do the economic stability of rural communities. The immediate and long-term impacts of COVID-19, while not yet fully realized, will surely be catastrophic without thoughtful policy-making based on intel from those who are dealing with the impacts on the ground and in real time.

We echo the sentiments expressed by our colleagues in their April 16th letter requesting that you immediately assemble a “Rural COVID-19 Task Force” to help identify rural needs and tailor the allocation of available resources to address them. A “Rural COVID-19 Task Force” would be invaluable to both the Department of Agriculture and to Congress as we work together to address the immediate challenges before us and as we craft a pathway to economic recovery.

We agree that listening to rural leaders and citizens about the challenges they face and providing a forum for productive discussion is the only way we can truly deliver tangible solutions for rural communities. That being said, it’s imperative that the task force include representation from across the country, particularly from states such as California where rural communities are dependent upon a strong agricultural sector.

Oftentimes, the federal definition of rural excludes rural communities in California that may have higher populations than elsewhere in the country but are for all intents and purposes rural and highly dependent upon the agricultural sector. Rural communities in California have already incurred significant economic and other damages resulting from COVID-19. Food banks are experiencing record demand while farmers have been forced to leave valuable crops unharvested due to lost contracts as the food service sector collapses. Further, existing and persistent issues such as access to health care and limited broadband connectivity have been exacerbated by COVID-19.

We call upon you to swiftly assemble a “Rural COVID-19 Task Force” that includes representatives from California, the Nation’s leading agricultural state, to do a comprehensive evaluation of the impacts of COVID-19 to our rural communities and begin identifying solutions that together we can work to achieve for our collective constituencies.

We offer our support for a USDA “Rural COVID-19 Taskforce” and thank you for your work to ensure America’s farmers, ranchers, and dairymen are equipped with the resources necessary to continue operating during this unprecedented crisis.

Sincerely,

TJ Cox
Member of Congress

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator

Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

John Garamendi
Member of Congress

Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress

Josh Harder
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress

Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress

Mike Thompson
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress

Jim Costa
Member of Congress